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**AQUATIC INVERTEBRATES AND HABITAT AT A FIXED STATION ON THE
CLARK'S FORK OF THE YELLOWSTONE RIVER,
CARBON COUNTY, MONTANA**

July 24, 2001

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**A report to
the Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Helena, Montana**

**by
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May 2002**

INTRODUCTION

This report is one of 38 brief interpretive summaries of data assembled as part of a statewide, multi-year study conducted by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MT DEQ). Each report discusses information generated from a single benthic invertebrate sample collection and habitat evaluation at a fixed station established on a gauged river or high-order tributary. The present treatise focuses on the aquatic community sampled on the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River at Edgar, Montana on July 24, 2001. The sample site was located by GPS reading at 45° 27' 52" N, 108° 50' 27" W, lying within the Montana Valley and Foothill Prairies Ecoregion (Woods et al. 1998). The sample was collected by personnel of MT DEQ. Sampling effort consisted of either a composite of four Hess samples, or a one-minute kicknet collection (Bukantis 1998). Habitat parameters were evaluated using the MT DEQ Macroinvertebrate Habitat Assessment Field Form for streams with riffle/run prevalence. Invertebrate samples were processed and animals identified by Rhithron Associates, Inc. Analysis of invertebrate assemblages was accomplished by applying the revised method (Bollman 1998) for streams of Western Montana's ecoregions. The method uses a multimetric battery to evaluate disturbance to biotic integrity.

The revised bioassessment metric battery and its scoring criteria have not been evaluated for application to higher-order streams and rivers; to date, no bioassessment method has been contrived for these waterways in Montana. Thus, the method used here is likely to have limitations in its applicability to the sites in this study. Ninety-eight sites in Western Montana were used to assemble the revised metric battery and to test it for sensitivity in detecting impairment, to establish scoring criteria, and to improve robustness of bioassessment. These 98 sites were mainly second and third order streams; the sampling season roughly corresponded to that of the fixed-station study. Mean water temperature for these sites at the time of sampling was 15°C (median = 14°C). The sites sampled for the fixed stations study are quite different from these test streams. Twenty-five sites located in Western Montana were sampled between July 23 and August 25, 2001 for this study. All are riverine or high-order waterways. Mean water temperature for these sites at the time of sampling was 19.8°C (median = 19.4°). Temperatures ranged from 15.5°C (Kootenai River near Libby) to 25.3°C (Jefferson River near Three Forks). Natural variations in benthic community composition and structure along longitudinal and thermal gradients are well known phenomena. Thus, scores and classifications were established for much smaller systems with significantly lower water temperatures than those included in the fixed stations study group. Impairment classifications and use support designations in this study must be interpreted with care. Results from the application of other metric batteries may be found in the Appendix

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 itemizes the nine evaluated habitat parameters and shows the assigned scores for each, as well as the integrated score and condition category.

Overall habitat conditions scored marginally at this site on the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone. Instream habitats were perceived to be limited by moderately heavy sediment deposition, and benthic substrate particles were extensively embedded. Benthic substrate was judged somewhat monotonous. Flow conditions were considered marginal. Moderate instability of streambanks was noted, and the riparian zone width was restricted

on both sides of the channel. Cattle grazing was permitted up to the water's edge on the left bank. Some alteration of channel morphology was also reported.

Table 1. Stream and riparian habitat assessment for a fixed station on the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River. July 2001.

Max. possible score	Parameter	Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone at Edgar
10	Riffle development	6
10	Benthic substrate	6
20	Embeddedness	8
20	Channel alteration	13
20	Sediment deposition	8
20	Channel flow status	7
20	Bank stability: left / right	4 / 4
20	Bank vegetation: left / right	7 / 9
20	Vegetated zone: left / right	4 / 6
160	Total	86
	Percent of maximum CONDITION*	54 MARGINAL

*Condition categories: Optimal > 80% of maximum score, Sub-optimal 75 - 56%; Marginal 49 - 29%; Poor <23%. Adapted from Platkin et al. 1998.

Table 2. Metric values, scores, and bioassessment for a fixed station on the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River. The revised bioassessment metric battery (Bollman 1998) was used for the evaluation. July 2001.

	Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone at Edgar	
METRICS	METRIC VALUES	METRIC SCORES
Ephemeroptera richness	6	3
Plecoptera richness	2	2
Trichoptera richness	7	3
Number of sensitive taxa	1	1
Percent filterers	28.9	0
Percent tolerant taxa	23.3	1
	TOTAL SCORE (max.=18)	10
	PERCENT OF MAX.	56
	Impairment classification	SLIGHT
	USE SUPPORT	PARTIAL

Bioassessment results are given in Table 2. When this bioassessment method is applied to these data, scores indicate that this site on the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River is slightly impaired and only partially supports designated uses.

The biotic index value (3.91) and mayfly taxa richness (6) were both within expected limits, suggesting that water quality at this site was unimpaired by nutrients.

toxics, or thermal impacts. The sensitive stonefly *Doroneuria* sp. was collected at this site, supporting the hypothesis that good water quality characterized the site. Moderately warm water temperature and other characteristically riverine conditions were indicated by the presence of the mayfly *Traverella* sp., and the aquatic moth *Petrophila* sp.

Fourteen “clinger” taxa and a rich caddisfly fauna (7 taxa) imply that hard substrates were available for colonization, so although the habitat evaluators observed moderate deposition of sediment, unimpaired areas appeared to have persisted in the channel. The assemblage was taxonomically rich, and predators were well-represented (26 animals in 6 taxa) suggesting that instream habitats of all types were plentiful and diverse. Only 2 stonefly taxa were collected; low stonefly taxa richness may be associated with disruptions to large-scale habitat features such as riparian zone function, streambank stability, or channel morphology.

All expected functional components were present in the sampled assemblage, scrapers were less abundant than expected. This may have been a result of the turbidity of the water, as noted in the field observations.

CONCLUSIONS

- Good water quality and adequate unimpaired habitats supported a diverse assemblage of benthic organisms.
- Turbid water may have been a factor limiting the abundance of scrapers among the functional components of the community.
- The bioassessment method appears to under-estimate the quality of the benthic fauna at this site. Given the taxonomic composition, functional structure, and tolerance characteristics of the assemblage, non-impairment of biotic health is indicated.

LITERATURE CITED

Bollman, W. 1998. Improving Stream Bioassessment Methods for the Montana Valleys and Foothill Prairies Ecoregion. Master's (M.S.) Thesis. University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

Bukantis, R. 1998. Rapid bioassessment macroinvertebrate protocols: Sampling and sample analysis SOP's. Working draft, April 22, 1997. Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Planning Prevention and Assistance Division, Helena, Montana.

Woods, A.J., Omernik, J. M. Nesser, J.A., Shelden, J., and Azevedo, S. H. 1999. Ecoregions of Montana. (Color poster with map, descriptive text, summary tables, and photographs): Reston, Virginia. US Geological Survey.

APPENDIX

Taxonomic data and summaries

Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River

July 2001

Aquatic Invertebrate Taxonomic Data

Site Name: Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River at Edgar

Date: 7/24/01

Site ID: Y05CLFYR01

Approx. percent of sample used 100

Taxon	Quantity	Percent	HBI	FFG
<i>Limnodrilus hoffmeisteri</i>	10	3.14	10	CG
<i>Acani</i>	1	0.31	5	PA
Total Misc. Taxa	11	3.46		
<i>Baetis tricaudatus</i>	5	1.57	4	CG
<i>Ephemerella inermis infrequens</i>	18	5.66	4	CG
<i>Rhithrogena</i> sp.	10	3.14	0	CG
<i>Stenonema</i> sp.	7	2.20	3.5	SC
<i>Traverella</i> sp.	68	21.38	2	CG
<i>Tricorythodes minutus</i>	15	4.72	4	CG
Total Ephemeroptera	123	38.68		
<i>Claassenia sabulosa</i>	4	1.26	3	PR
<i>Doroneuria</i> sp.	4	1.26	0	PR
Total Plecoptera	8	2.52		
<i>Arctopsyche grandis</i>	7	2.20	2	PR
<i>Brachycentrus occidentalis</i>	27	8.49	2	CF
<i>Cheumatopsyche</i> sp.	29	9.12	5	CF
<i>Hydropsyche</i> sp.	34	10.69	5	CF
<i>Hydroptila</i> sp.	9	2.83	6	PH
<i>Oecetis</i> sp.	2	0.63	8	PR
<i>Psychomyia</i> sp.	2	0.63	2	CG
Total Trichoptera	110	34.59		
<i>Petrophila</i> sp.	1	0.31	5	SC
Total Lepidoptera	1	0.31		
<i>Heterolimnius</i> sp.	1	0.31	3	CG
<i>Microcylloepus</i> sp.	1	0.31	5	SC
<i>Optioservus</i> sp.	2	0.63	5	SC
<i>Zaitzevia</i> sp.	2	0.63	5	CG
Total Coleoptera	6	1.89		
<i>Simulium</i> sp.	1	0.31	5	CF
<i>Hexatoma</i> sp.	8	2.52	2	PR
Total Diptera	9	2.83		
<i>Eukiefferiella Gracei</i> Gr.	1	0.31	8	CG
<i>Eukiefferiella Pseudomontana</i> Gr	2	0.63	8	CG
<i>Microtendipes</i> sp.	1	0.31	6	CF
<i>Paratanytarsus</i> sp.	29	9.12	6	UN
<i>Polypedilum</i> sp.	15	4.72	6	SH
<i>Thienemannimyia</i> Gr	1	0.31	5	PR
<i>Tvetenia</i> sp.	1	0.31	5	CG
Total Chironomidae	50	15.72		
Grand Total	318	100.00		

Aquatic Invertebrate Summary

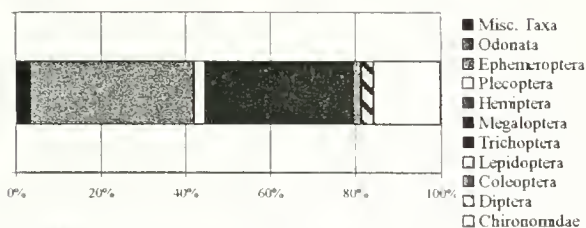
Site Name: Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River at E Date: 7/24/01

SAMPLE TOTAL 318

EPT abundance 241
TAXA RICHNESS 31
Number EPT taxa 15
Percent EPT 75.79

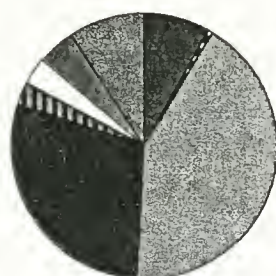
TAXONOMIC COMPOSITION

GROUP	PERCENT	#TAXA	ABUNDANCE
Misc. Taxa	3.46	2	11
Odonata	0.00	0	0
Ephemeroptera	38.68	6	123
Plecoptera	2.52	2	8
Hemiptera	0.00	0	0
Megaloptera	0.00	0	0
Trichoptera	34.59	7	110
Lepidoptera	0.31	1	1
Coleoptera	1.89	4	6
Diptera	2.83	2	9
Chironomidae	15.72	7	50



FUNCTIONAL COMPOSITION

GROUP	PERCENT	#TAXA	ABUNDANCE
Predator	8.18	6	26
Parasite	0.31	1	1
Gatherer	42.45	12	135
Filterer	28.93	5	92
Herbivore	0.00	0	0
Piercer	2.83	1	9
Scraper	3.46	4	11
Shredder	4.72	1	15
Xylophage	0.00	0	0
Omnivore	0.00	0	0
Unknown	9.12	1	29



COMMUNITY TOLERANCES

Sediment tolerant taxa	3
Percent sediment tolerant	10.38
Sediment sensitive taxa	2
Percent sediment sensitive	2.83
Metals tolerance index (McGuire)	3.04
Cold stenotherm taxa	1
Percent cold stenotherms	1.26

Site ID: Y0SCLFY R01

DOMINANCE

TAXON	ABUNDANCE	PERCENT
<i>Traverella</i> sp	68	21.38
<i>Hydropsyche</i> sp	34	10.69
<i>Cheumatopsyche</i> sp	29	9.12
<i>Paratanaisius</i> sp	29	9.12
<i>Brachycentrus occidentalis</i>	27	8.49
SUBTOTAL 5 DOMINANTS	187	58.81
<i>Ephemerella inermis infrequens</i>	18	5.66
<i>Tricorythodes minutus</i>	15	4.72
<i>Polypedilum</i> sp	15	4.72
<i>Lamodrilus hoffmeisteri</i>	10	3.14
<i>Rhythrogena</i> sp	10	3.14
TOTAL DOMINANTS	255	80.19

SAPROBITY

Hilsenhoff Biotic Index	3.91
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DIVERSITY

Shannon H (loge)	2.38
Shannon H (log2)	3.44

Simpson D	0.08
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VOLTINISM

TYPE	ABUNDANCE	PERCENT
Multivoltine	65	20.36
Univoltine	205	64.54
Semivoltine	48	15.09

TAXA CHARACTERS

	#TAXA	ABUNDANCE	PERCENT
Tolerant	10	74	23.27
Intolerant	1	4	1.26
Clinger	14	163	51.26

BIOASSESSMENT INDICES

B-IBI (Karr et al.)

METRIC	VALUE	SCORE
Taxa richness	31	3
E richness	6	3
P richness	2	1
T richness	7	3
Long-lived	6	5
Sensitive richness	1	1
%tolerant	23.27	3
%predators	8.18	1
Clinger richness	14	3
%dominance (3)	41.19	5

TOTAL SCORE 28 56 %

MONTANA DEQ METRICS (Bukantis 1998)

METRIC	VALUE	Plains Ecoregions	Valleys and Foothills	Mountain Ecoregions
Taxa richness	31	3	3	3
EPT richness	15	3	3	1
Biotic Index	3.91	3	3	2
%Dominant taxon	21.38	3	3	3
%Collectors	71.38	2	2	1
%EPT	75.79	3	3	3
Shannon Diversity	3.44	3		
%Scrapers + Shredd	8.18	1	0	0
Predator taxa	6	3		
%Multivoltine	20.36	3		
%H of T	57.2		3	
TOTAL SCORES		27	20	13
PERCENT OF MAXIMUM		90.00	83.33	61.90
IMPAIRMENT CLASS		NON	NON	SLIGHT

Montana DEQ metric barrieries

